

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 SINGAP 05779 290238Z  
ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03  
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 EB-07  
OMB-01 TRSE-00 /063 W  
-----290246Z 016066 /67

R 290145Z DEC 76  
FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6819  
INFO AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 5779

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PINT, SN  
SUBJECT: TOH CHIN CHYE'S POST-ELECTION COMMENTS

REF: SINGAPORE 5740

1. MINISTER OF HEALTH (AND PAP CHAIRMAN) DR. TOH CHIN CHYE'S ELECTION REMARKS WERE SURPRISINGLY THE MOST INTERESTING AND INTROSPECTIVE OF THE PAP CANDIDATES'. ACKNOWLEDGING THE DISSATISFACTIONS THAT WERE BY AND LARGE IGNORED DURING THE PAP'S ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN, TOH MADE A STRONG PITCH FOR MORE FREQUENT AND OPEN PUBLIC DEBATES ON GOVERNMENT DECISIONS.

2. "ONE OF THE REASONS WHY THE PEOPLE OF SINGAPORE FEEL RESTLESS (IS) THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS DOING OR MAKING DECISIONS WHICH THEY FEEL ARE BEING RAMMED DOWN THEIR THROATS.

3. "SO I WOULD WANT TO URGE MY COLLEAGUES IN THE CABINET THAT THE AD HOC DECISIONS, OR DECISIONS MADE BY STATUTORY BODIES UNDER THEIR CHARGE, SHOULD NOT JUST BE ANNOUNCED IN THE PRESS AND ACTION IMMEDIATELY TAKEN BY CIVIL SERVANTS, BUT THEY SHOULD BE DULY ARGUED OUT  
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IN PARLIAMENT AND THE BACKBENCHERS BE GIVEN A CHANCE TO EXPRESS THEIR VIEWS AS WELL AS TO REFLECT THE VIEWS OF THEIR CONSTITUENTS.

4. " THIS I AM VERY CONCERNED ABOUT, BECAUSE UNLESS WE DO SO WE WILL ONCE MORE HAVE ANOTHER ELECTION WHERE

PEOPLE WILL FAIL TO SEE OR WANT TO SEE THE ISSUES AT STAKE, BUT WILL ASK FOR OPPOSITION FOR THE SAKE OF OPPOSITION.

5. "I THINK THAT IT IS A VERY FAIR CONCLUSION, BECAUSE I MYSELF IS (SIC) A MEMBER OF THE GOVERNMENT AND I KNOW HOW DECISIONS ARE SOMETIMES ARRIVED AT. BUT I ALSO KNOW HOW OUR BACKBENCHERS FEEL ABOUT THIS. ONE EXAMPLE WAS THE INCREASED CAR TAX, WHICH WAS JUST ANNOUNCED OVER TELEVISION AND MOST OF US WERE JUST TAKEN ABACK. AND I THINK THAT WAS ADMITTEDLY A MISTAKE. IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN DEBATED IN PARLIAMENT JUST LIKE ANY OTHER FINANCIAL BUDGET WHICH WE TAKE ONCE A YEAR. IF NECESSARY, WE CAN HAVE A MINI-BUDGET IN THE MIDDLE OF THE YEAR. THIS WILL TAKE A LOT OF HEAT AND FRUSTRATION OFF PEOPLE WHO FEEL THAT THEY DO NOT HAVE A VOICE.

6. "I BELIEVE THAT IF WE DO THIS, THE MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT WHOM THEY HAVE ELECTED WILL BE ABLE TO REFLECT THEIR VIEWS."

7. COMMENT: MANY MPS SILENTLY SHARE TOH'S DESIRE TO OPEN UP THE POLITICAL PROCESS. HOWEVER, TOH'S FORTHRIGHT REMARKS MAY BE INTERPRETED AS A DIRECT SLAP AT PM LEE'S ARROGANCE AND HIS STYLE OF GOVERNMENT. SOME OBSERVERS TAKE TOH'S STATEMENT AS CONFIRMATION OF THE RUMORS ABOUT THE PAP SPLIT (SINGAPORE 5698), ALTHOUGH HARD EVIDENCE OF A SPLIT REMAINS LACKING.

8. TOH'S REMARKS SHOULD FIND A READY RESPONSE AMONG CONFIDENTIAL

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DISAFFECTED ENGLISH-EDUCATED PROFESSIONALS, WHO HAVE BEEN PARTICULARLY IRKED BY PERCEPTIONS OF PAP ARROGANCE AND HIGH-HANDEDNESS. ALTHOUGH DISAFFECTION WITH THE PAP WAS NOT TRANSLATED INTO INCREASED OPPOSITION VOTES, THE GROWING POLITICAL MATURITY OF THE SINGAPOREAN ELECTORATE HAS REDUCED TOLERANCE FOR GOVERNMENTAL INSENSITIVITY.

9. WHILE THE ALLEGED PAP SPLIT MAY REFLECT NOTHING MORE THAN A HEALTHY DISSENSION WITHIN THE PARTY, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT BASIC POLITICAL BELIEFS, RATHER THAN TACTICS OR STYLE, MAY BE IN CONFLICT. WHEN TOH DISCUSSES ARBITRARY GOVERNMENT DECISIONS TAKEN WITHOUT PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE HE IS, AFTER ALL, REFERRING TO DECISIONS REACHED OR AT LEAST APPROVED IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE. SINGAPORE HAS NOT BEEN A MODEL OF PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY, BUT NOW IT SEEMS THERE IS OBVIOUS CONTENTION OVER THE EXECUTIVE-LEGISLATIVE RELATIONSHIP WITHIN THE

GOS.

10. LOCALS PUNDITS ARE AWAITING THE CABINET APPOINTMENTS  
AND THE FIRST PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES TO PROVIDE NEW  
SIGNS AND PORTENDS. AS NO MAJOR PAP FIGURE HAS  
SECONDED TOH'S REMARKS, IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER  
TOH'S WISHES WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE NEW PARLIAMENT.  
HOLDRIDGE

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## Message Attributes

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